

Oakland Tribune

Bay Area politicians stand firm on war

Jeers as Stark, Lee, Honda vote against Congress resolution

By Lisa Friedman
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Saturday, March 22, 2003 - WASHINGTON -- As the rest of Congress stampeded this week to get behind America's men and women in uniform, some Bay Area Democrats heeded their infamously different drummers.

Representatives Pete Stark of Fremont, Barbara Lee of Oakland and Mike Honda of San Jose voted against a resolution early Friday supporting the 250,000 troops in the Persian Gulf.

Their votes drew jeers and expressions of disbelief from Republicans. But Lee, Stark and Honda, all critics of President Bush's diplomatic dealings with Iraq, accused the GOP of playing politics with the resolution by adding rhetoric that praises Bush.

"I stand united with my colleagues behind our men and women in uniform," said Stark, a U.S. Air Force veteran. But, he said, "I couldn't support a resolution that exonerates President Bush for his diplomatic failure."

"Keeping our troops out of harm's way has been and remains first and foremost on my mind and in my heart. ... What I cannot support, though, is this resolution that endorses the war against Iraq that is now under way," said Lee.

The resolution passed in the conduct of military operations in Iraq as part of the on-going global war on terrorism."

The resolution also declares that "the president's use of military force against Iraq is consistent with necessary ongoing efforts by the United States and other countries against international terrorists and terrorist organizations."

Rep. Charles Rangel, D-N.Y., called it "a crass attempt to use our support of brave U.S. armed service men and women for political purposes."

Honda noted that he, Stark, Lee, Rangel and other Democrats tried to put forth a bill that supported U.S. troops without addressing the divisive politics of war. That offering was rejected.

"House Republican leadership denied the troops this message of unity, and decided to politicize the issue by drafting a resolution that included language in support of President Bush's misguided Iraq policy. I could not support this," Honda said.

But by the time lawmakers finally voted on the resolution at 3 a.m. Friday it had won the support of most Bay Area Democrats, including Pelosi, Ellen Tauscher of Alamo, Mike Thompson of Napa, George Miller of Martinez and Lynn Woolsey of Marin.

Rep. Tom Lantos, D-San Mateo, missed the vote because of a miscommunication with floor staff, an aide said. He intends to file a notice with the House Speaker on Monday indicating his support for it, the aide said.

By contrast, the Senate resolution that earned unanimous support simply "commends and supports the efforts and the leadership of the president as commander in chief, in the conflict against Iraq."

Karen Hanretty, spokeswoman for the California Republican Party, said the dissenting votes of Bay Area and other antiwar Democrats "demonstrates just how out-of-touch liberal members of Congress are with the majority of Americans."

While about two-thirds of Americans according to a recent ABC poll reported approve of President Bush's handling of the situation in Iraq, a survey of California residents by the Public Policy Institute of California found only between 20 and 29 percent of adults favored military action.

Also voting against the "support the troops" resolution were representatives Maxine Waters of Los Angeles, John Conyers of Illinois and Jim McDermott of Washington. Antiwar presidential hopeful Dennis Kucinich of Ohio voted "present."

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